

Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee

Washington Lempster Marlow Gilsum Sullivan Surry Keene Swanzey Winchester Hinsdale

2015 Annual Report

The Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC) was established in 1994, one year after the Ashuelot River was enrolled into the State Rivers Management and Protection Program. Members are nominated by local municipal officials and appointed by the Commissioner of the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES).

The volunteer **Ashuelot River water quality monitoring program** continued for its fifteenth season, in conjunction with the DES Volunteer River Assessment Program (VRAP). ARLAC members, working with community volunteers, participated in a spring training session, leading to monthly sampling May through September. The Ashuelot River is classified as "class B," meaning that it is considered suitable for fishing, swimming and other recreational uses.

- We sampled 11 sites along the River's 64-mile length, and 3 sites along the South Branch in Swanzey.
- We obtained E. coli samples from June through September, and total phosphorous samples from July through September.
- The cost of lab analyses was covered by contributions from Conservation Commissions along the River and DES.
- Over 200 hours were logged by 22 volunteers. New volunteers are welcome!
- A quick look at this year's results:

E.coli--most samples met the "class B" level for surface waters. However, the September sampling exceeded (showing contamination) Class B levels at sites from the Stone Arch Bridge in Keene to Hinsdale, and the South Branch. This likely reflects high flows experienced that day due to prior heavy rain and more run-off.

pH levels-- continued an upward trend with the majority of readings at the acceptable level of 6.5-8.0. The upper reaches (Marlow & north) and the South Branch continue to be the most acidic, with readings mostly above 6.0 but as low as 5.56 in Washington.

Dissolved oxygen, total phosphorus, chloride, turbidity, and specific conductance remained within the standard.

As mandated by DES, **ARLAC reviews and comments on state permit applications** within the River corridor that have potential impacts on the River. Included this year were:

- 14 Wetland, Shoreland or Alteration of Terrain projects in Washington, Gilsum, Keene, Swanzey, and Winchester.
- 4 site visits, and one complaint investigation.
- Comments on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) application by West Street Hydro.
- Support for procurement of Aquatic Mitigation Funds and Moose Plate funds for easement purchase & restoration of floodplain in Swanzey.
- Support for Alternative "C" of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan.
- Support for the NH Instream Flow Study Report.

We strive to educate ourselves on a broad array of issues associated with the River and its watershed. We hope to be a resource that works well between the interests and concerns of the citizens in the watershed and State authorities. Activities included:

- 2014 River monitoring data analysis by Dr. Stephen Stepenuck.
- Viewing of a webinar on dam removal by Laura Wildman, PE of Princeton Hydro.
- Serving as a resource to Keene State College students who were conducting senior projects.
- Recommendation of six Monadnock Regional High School students for NH Fish and Game Annual Award of Excellence.
- Participation in both regional and state-wide meetings covering topics such as: NH Instream Flow protection, the Silvio Conte Refuge Conservation Plan, the NH Wildlife Action Plan, FERC relicensing of Connecticut River hydro dams, preliminary hydrological report of expected impacts of the West Street Dam removal, and Ecological Flood Mitigation.

The **Annual River cleanup** took place September 25 and 26 in conjunction with the Connecticut River Watershed Council's Source to Sea Clean-up:

- 115 volunteers collected two tons of trash in Swanzey and Keene from The Branch and the Ashuelot Rivers, and Beaver Brook.

We continue to have a Facebook presence as the *Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee*.

River monitoring data can be viewed at des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/vrap/data.htm.

Current E.coli results can be viewed during the monitoring season at www.ctriver.us.

ARLAC meets the third Tuesday monthly at 7 p.m. at the Keene Public Library. We invite citizens and town officials to contact their local ARLAC representatives with any concerns or interest in participating as a town representative.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Skuly, Chairman

2015 Membership: Gus Merwin & Carl MacConnell, Marlow; Pablo Fleischmann, Gilsum; John Davis, Surry; Jim Holley, Keene; Barbara Skuly & Chuck Mills, Swanzey; Christopher John, Winchester; Brett Thelen, Harris Center for Conservation Education.